

97-84203-12

Breshko-Breshkovskâia,
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Orphans' settlements in
Russia

New York

[1919]

97-84203-12
MASTER NEGATIVE #

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Box 840 Breshko-Breshkovskaiā, Ekaterina (Verigo)
1844-1934.
Orphans' settlements in Russia. New York,
Russian information bureau [1919],
16 p.

I. Orphans and orphan asylums - Russia.
I. Title.

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TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35mm

REDUCTION RATIO: 9:1

IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA IIA IB IIB

DATE FILMED: 9-30-97

INITIALS: PB

TRACKING #: 28280

FILMED BY PRESERVATION RESOURCES, BETHLEHEM, PA.

S-S (50)

Orphans' Settlements in Russia

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308
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Box 840

Published by
The Russian Information Bureau
Woolworth Building
New York City

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575050

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Orphans' Settlements in Russia

I

ECONOMIC, technical and financial help from the outside is indispensable in building up Russia as a free, democratic and thoroughly organized State. But, at this moment there is still another problem of great importance, and this is the problem of rendering Russia cultural help. The three years of war with Germany, during which we have suffered not less than ten million casualties, of whom three million were killed, and the horrors of the civil war started by the Bolsheviks, who have covered the country with tens of fronts and have established a regime of starvation where thousands fall in the streets daily—all these misfortunes in Russia's life during the past four and a half years have resulted in a situation whereby we have 4,000,000 orphans, helpless children, deprived of shelter and paternal care. These 4,000,000 children present a problem not for Russia alone, but for the entire civilized world. These children must be brought up and

educated for the duties of citizenship, and they will be a powerful factor in building up a free, happy, democratic Russia. But, if they will be left to themselves, a great number of them will die, and the rest, probably the majority, growing without shelter and care, may in the future poison the life not of Russia alone, but of the rest of Europe and probably of the entire civilized world.

If Russia for the time being were not destroyed as a State, she would be able to care for her children herself. There are millions of war-orphans in other European countries which have participated in the great War, but these countries are organized, their governments are paying war pensions, they have normal legislatures which will undoubtedly take up and solve in a satisfactory way the problem of raising the fatherless generation. But Russia is destroyed and therefore we must appeal to the world. It is not charity that I am appealing for; I am appealing for brotherly help. All our misfortunes, even the curse of Bolshevism, are the consequence of our participation in this war. We entered it under the inefficient and despotic regime of the Tzar, industrially and culturally undeveloped, less than any other nation of Europe prepared for a modern struggle. But, for three long years, covering the battlefields with mil-

lions of our graves, we stood at our posts defending justice and democracy, and our present ruin is the consequence of our readiness to give up everything for the rule of democracy in Europe. During the three years our armies have saved the Allied cause at many critical moments. Finally German militarism has been beaten, and Russia is in ruin because she has sacrificed her youth, her wealth and her enthusiasm to make the victory over Prussianism possible.

It is the moral duty of the democratic nations throughout the world to help raise and educate the fatherless children of Russia! I appeal to the great American people to render us this help, knowing their friendship and brotherly affection for the people of Russia. For this purpose I have come to this country.

I visited the United States fourteen years ago, and since then I have heard and still hear the Americans expressing friendship for the Russian people and willingness to help them in their difficulties. If these expressions are not mere words intended to console us in our grief, but sincere sympathy resulting from an understanding that it is the duty of a progressive people to help backward nations in their development so that mankind may progress more or less evenly, with nations living in friendship one with the

other; if they are the result of an understanding that the ignorance of one country endangers the peaceful development of other countries—then my hopes and the hopes of my countrymen will be realized. We will be assisted in our hard and weary work with financial help; with skillful hands to teach us different trades; with noble characters possessing steadfastness, who will set before us the example of a life of labor and achievement, a life which does not fear privation and hard work.

Russia has enough land on which to erect homes for children, with schools, work shops, and agricultural departments. There is also enough material with which to erect the necessary buildings. However, we need capital to buy school furniture, the equipment of workshops and agricultural establishments. This we cannot obtain in Russia. All equipment for school-houses and school-yards, together probably with many skilled and patient teachers, we have to get from friendly America. Money is needed mainly to pay the laborers and employees.

Naturally, the difficult problem as to the conditions under which and in what surroundings 4,000,000 children can be given full maintenance and instruction cannot be solved at once. It will require millions of dollars and a great number of

people to train the fatherless youth of our nation. However, as the saying goes, "Without a beginning there is no end." It is our duty to make a beginning as soon as possible and thus give a clear illustration of what can be done in caring for the well-being of our growing generation, of our young, future Russia.

I would suggest beginning as soon as possible for I do not doubt in the least that in this work we will have the sympathy and support of our democratic Cooperative Organizations and Zemstvos. These institutions are naturally very much interested in the education of the fatherless children and will be glad to see a beginning which might serve as a model for their own undertakings. There are already in Central Russia and in Siberia regions which are protected against disorders and destruction and where you can live quietly and establish Settlements for children.

II

Formerly, we had in Russia but very few such institutions as Orphans' Settlements, or as we used to call them, "children's colonies." But there were in our country many orphanages established partly by the Municipalities and Zemstvos, partly by several charitable socie-

ties, as well as by individuals who gave money for building a home for some scores of orphans, and furnished the means for maintaining these orphanages.

All those institutions, however, never sufficed for the great number of orphans in such a large country as Russia. Therefore, most of the destitute children were destined to a life of misery and deprivation, devoid of moral support and education. They were not given a chance to learn some useful handicraft, and in most cases were left wholly illiterate, as Russia has been very poor in schools and in industries of every kind. The former monarchist government did not give much thought to the education of the people.

At the present time, after nearly five years of external and internal warfare, during which millions of grown-up people have been killed or disabled, and not only men but also women have been exhausted to the utmost by the distress resulting from the incessant destruction of Russia's life,—the number of orphans and destitute children in our country has been multiplied many times. Suffering from the disorder and violence of the incessant warfare, the Russian people, left to themselves, are utterly unable to cope with the enormous task of bringing up such a vast number of destitute children, of educating them properly, i.e., of creating honest

and self-supporting citizens conscious of their duty towards their country and their fellow-citizens.

Considering the problem how to surmount the imminent danger of millions of the new generation of Russian people being left without any chance of getting their standing in life as well as the necessary moral and intellectual development, I conceived the following plan by which Russia can be given assistance in bringing up her orphan children, the plan that has been approved by my fellow-countrymen experienced in such matters.

Russia abounds in fertile land that until now has been only partially cultivated, and by this fact alone she is destined to remain an agricultural country. Therefore, we must get our children adapted to the conditions of their natural activities in the future, and bring them up in the surroundings of rural life, not only for the sake of their health, and not only in order to accustom them to the love of nature, but in order to teach them how to till the soil, how to breed cattle, to teach them dairying, the care of poultry, etc. In most parts of Russia we have only half a year for the outside agricultural work. This season can be made the most of to teach the children practical farming. The remaining six months of winter-time must be devoted to school work

and apprenticeship in different kinds of trades applicable to the village husbandry. One must not forget that the cities are only exceptions in our country, there being but little difference between small cities and villages, since the population of the former get their living, to a great extent, from orchard and farm cultivation.

I am sure that the idea of bringing up children in such a way will be met in Russia with general approval and support. With the help of our Zemstvos, and especially of the Volosts, representing the smallest communal unities, and therefore expressing the direct needs and wants of the millions of our rural population throughout the country, some hundreds of acres might be easily procured for the aforesaid aim. On such an allotment suitable dwellings must be built for a few hundreds of children, as well as for the necessary staff of tutors and teachers. Service-buildings must also be provided for farming and handicraft work.

In conformity with the existing needs, Russia must be gradually covered with scores of such settlements, each of them adapted for a few hundred children, so that in two, three or four years, in accordance with the age of children, these institutions would be able to secure for their pupils an independent living on

their own earnings. They must begin to work early in their life, as it is usual in our villages that the children partake in the work of the grown-up people as soon as they come out of childhood. There is no harm in it, as the children brought up in the country are much stronger than their brothers in the towns, and, moreover, their outside work is incomparably healthier.

But in the winter-time the children must complete their education by acquiring the knowledge of the world and mankind. At the same time they must be taught many practical things relating to husbandry and the farming business, with its applications. Girls must acquire the knowledge of plain cooking, sewing, spinning, weaving and knitting, gardening, dairying and poultry raising. Boys must learn farming and the use of agricultural machinery during the summer season, and in the winter serve their apprenticeship as carpenters, smiths, locksmiths, harness-makers, cobblers, etc. Everyone in the colony must be taught some handicraft in order to gain his own living by it in the future.

The children's colony, on the whole, must be organized in such a manner that after some time it would be a self-supporting family, satisfying all its wants with the hands of its own pupils.

At the present time when there is practically no organized industry left in Russia, it is necessary that there be in the villages, as well as in the towns, skilled hands to satisfy the primary needs of the population. If there were normal conditions of life in Russia, all our needs might certainly be satisfied with our own means. But, after our whole industry, all our mines, mills and factories have been destroyed by the ruthless activities of the Bolsheviks, at first aided by the German prisoners of war accumulated in Russia, later, by the disorder caused by the internal war, there is nothing left for us but to start organizing trades of every kind if we would avoid the danger of falling back into the savagery of old times.

The magnitude of the task and the expenses involved make it an extremely serious matter, but its importance is beyond all question. The aim of transforming millions of destitute children, deprived of all support and education, into citizens able to understand their duty towards themselves and their fellow-citizens is one that justifies all efforts and expenses, however great. The task is so much the harder in that it is to be performed under the crudest and most distressing conditions. No comforts such as one has in this country can be found in the villages of Russia,—no good roads,

no convenient means of transportation and for traveling, no regular mail, no shops where one can procure the most necessary things, as at the present time we have no goods of our own, and none are coming from foreign countries on account of lack of communication. At the places where our settlements for children are to be built up, we are sure that food-stuffs like grain and flour, meat, milk, butter, eggs and perhaps some vegetables can be secured, but no other goods will be available, first of all, no clothing and shoes, and then no tools nor books, as the latter are not printed for want of paper and printing implements.

Therefore, if some American women or men are ready to confront the above-mentioned hardships, these brave people must carry with them all they need for their own use, as well as the tools and school appliances for the use of the children they are going to teach, as all these things cannot be found in Russia at the present time.

I came to this country in order to tell all that to the American people, and to urge their help. In all my addresses and articles I entreat those who are friendly to the Russian people to come to our assistance, materially as well as morally. I invoke the sympathy of all people to strengthen our forces, and to support our

hopes of attaining the desired aim. We need money for the construction of necessary buildings, for the acquirement of the necessary things that cannot be made at home, and for the maintenance of the institutions for some time, until all the requirements are covered by the products of the work of the children themselves. Your material aid might also express itself in supplying the institutions with all the machinery and tools required for farming and handicraft purposes. Your moral help will consist in sending to our country some skilled workers who would make of our children as good workers as they themselves are and who would shape their character, communicating the honesty and firmness necessary to withstand the hardships of life, and to govern passions and weaknesses.

With the valuable aid of the American people we are sure to succeed in our enterprise, so much the more in that our Zemstvos (local communities) and the Cooperative Societies of our peasant population will lend necessary assistance and give us every support.

And as the suggestion I make now is intended to contribute to the welfare of all mankind, God and all human hearts faithful to Him will be with us, helping us in our unselfish endeavors.

Do not be deaf, my dear American

friends, to the call of the voice of love and duty towards mankind! Come to help those deprived to the utmost of all happiness in life, those millions of orphans whose hopes lie at the mercy of the world.

As to the organization through which the care and education of Russian orphans could be materialized, I suggest the following plan:

Here, in America, there is to be formed a Committee consisting of Americans, to which a Russian Sub-Committee may be added, as an auxiliary body with advisory and intermediate functions. No separate Russian Committee is needed in this country.

The chief objects of the American Committee must be:

(1) to collect funds,—donations in money and contributions in clothes, shoes, school appliances, tools and implements for handicraft work of different kinds, etc.;

(2) to manage the stores of wares given or bought and forward them to Russia;

(3) to appoint the representatives to be sent to the different localities of Russia and to provide them with the necessary instructions.

In Russia there are to be formed Special District Committees; first of all at

Vladivostok, for Siberia and the Ural regions; at Archangel, for Northern Russia, and at Odessa for the Southern Provinces.

These Committees are to be charged with taking care of the Settlements already existing but deprived of the means for carrying on their work. They are also to organize new settlements. This work must be done in such a way as to bring forth the support and cooperation of the local population, so that not only public bodies like the Zemstvos, but also the Cooperative Societies and private charity may be attracted to lending every possible help.

It is necessary that the activities of the Committee should not be confined exclusively to the care of orphans, since in the localities where Settlements are to be built there are certainly many destitute families unable to support their children, and therefore it is inevitable that some help must be given simultaneously to those children. The need of the Russian children is so great and involves such great expenses that it must be dealt with on a basis of the strictest economy in every expenditure. Therefore, the Orphans' Settlements must be built up on a very modest scale and provided only with such appliances as are indispensable for carrying on the work.

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